

DFEH News Brief

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 29, 2003

CONTACT: Dia S. Poole
(916) 227-2873

DFEH AND HUD ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP IN STATE'S FIRST MEDIATION PROGRAM FOR HOUSING DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS

Sacramento – The Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) today announced a new program for mediating housing discrimination complaints. This program is a first for the State of California and is the largest fair housing mediation program in the nation to be developed under HUD's Partnership Initiative with state fair housing enforcement agencies. It will provide California's tenants, landlords, and property owners and managers with a means of resolving housing discrimination cases in a fair, confidential, and cost-effective manner.

The announcement was made at a press conference held at the State Capitol where Department officials were joined by representatives from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), fair housing councils, housing provider associations, and human relations commissions.

Mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution that utilizes a trained, third-party facilitator to help the parties arrive at a mutually agreeable solution to the underlying issues causing the conflict. Key features of the program are that it is free of charge to the parties and that the mediation takes place within the first 30 days of the filing of the complaint, often avoiding the financial and emotional costs associated with a full DFEH investigation and potential litigation.

"Mediation is an attractive option for parties on both sides of a dispute," said DFEH Director Dennis Hayashi. "It brings people together in a way that lets them address the underlying issues at the root of the problem and decide the outcome of the complaint, given their unique situations. Overall, mediation saves time, money and, ultimately, stress."

Chuck Hauptman, Director, HUD Pacific/Hawaii Region Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) stated that, "DFEH processes one of every ten federal housing discrimination cases, so it makes sense to initiate the program in California. We have every expectation that the success of this enterprise will serve as a model for similar programs in other states." DFEH cases account for 20 percent of all HUD discrimination cases that are handled by state fair housing agencies.

DFEH Deputy Director Andrea Rosa will oversee the program. "Although the program's offices will be located in Sacramento and Los Angeles, mediations will be held throughout the state," Rosa said. "The convenience is an added benefit that we hope will encourage participation in the program." Referrals to the program are scheduled to begin on Monday, June 2, 2003.

Representatives voicing support for the program included: Bill Horne, Board of Directors, California Association of Realtors; Jennifer Strawn, VP Communications, California Apartment Association; Jim Lofgren, Executive Director, Rental Housing Association of Sacramento Valley; and Carmen Herrera, Fair Housing Compliance Officer; San Francisco Human Relations Commission; and Pat Lowell, Professional Standards Administrator, Sacramento Association of Realtors.

DFEH enforces laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Further information about DFEH and the Mediation Program may be obtained by accessing the Program's website at www.dfehmp.ca.gov. For additional information on HUD programs, call (800) 347-3739 or visit www.hud.gov.

#

PR-11-03